

Combat Instructor Training

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Combat Instructor Training

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To Major P. Bragg and Major B. Saunders CG #4

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On 10 October 2002 the Marine Corps released All Marine message 056/02¹ creating the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 8513 Marine Combat Instructor (MCI). This order designates the billet a Special Duty Assignment (SDA). This placed the instructors at the Schools of Infantry (SOI) in the same category as Drill Instructors, Recruiters, and Marine Security Guards (MSG) in terms of bonus pay, promotion incentives, and status. Marines in SDA assignments enjoy many incentives including bonus pay, promotion points, and increased opportunity to gain meritorious promotion. Traditionally, to earn the perks of a SDA, a Marine must complete a rigorous training program to prepare him physically and mentally for his role in a highly competitive and challenging duty environment. Additionally, this training must allow opportunity for growth in the assignment at all levels. Certain SDA commands, particularly the Marine Corps Recruit Depots, have learned, through trial and error, many effective methods of instructor training and employment. Although the duties of Drill Instructors and Combat Instructors are vastly different, the Schools of Infantry will be more effective by modeling Combat Instructor selection and

¹ All Marine Corps Message 056/02 Dated 09 October 2002.

training procedures after those used at Marine Corps Recruit Depots.

Instructor Selection

All USMC schools have minimum enrollment criteria. This criteria dictates the baseline quality of individual who will be accepted into the program. In the evolution of the Marine Combat Instructor, we have provided ample incentives to attract quality Marines to this important duty. Now we must examine in detail the screening criteria for service as a Marine Combat Instructor. A comparison of criteria for MCIC and DI School shows comparable selection criteria for both SDA assignments. Generally, the MCI and DI student must meet the following student minimum requirements:²³

Age: 22-37

ASVAB: 90 GT

Education: HS Graduate/ GED

Disciplinary: No more than 2 NJP in the last 5 years, no adverse pg. 11 entries, no drug/ alcohol incidents within 2 years of report date.

Physical: First Class Physical Fitness Test

Screening: Bn/Sqdn Commanding Officer recommendation

² Drill Instructor School Home page, MCRD Parris Island. Retrieved 26 November 2005.
http://www.mcrdpi.usmc.mil/di_main.htm

³ School of Infantry Home Page. Camp Lejeune, NC. Retrieved 26 November 2005.
<http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/soi/>

**We must focus Instructor training and establish a Marine
Combat Instructor School**

The quality of the Instructor is, as in any school, one of the most important factors for the success of the institution. The Schools of Infantry are no different. The training of the Marine Combat Instructor should be the first priority of the Schools of Infantry. The Combat Instructor School must become the basis for other Infantry Instruction. The School of Infantry east awards Marine Combat Instructors their MOS as a result of passing Marine Combat Instructor's Course (MCIC). MCIC is one of eight courses taught at the Advanced Infantry Training Company (AITC). These courses include Infantry Operations Chief's Course, Infantry Unit Leader's Course, Infantry Squad Leader's Course, Infantry Mortar Leader's Course, Infantry Machine Gun Leader's Course, Scout Sniper Basic Course, for Infantry Marines. Additionally, AITC trains Martial Arts Instructor's Course and Basic Machine Gun Course, which are open to all MOS's. The mission statement of the AITC is as follows:

1. The primary mission of the Advanced Infantry Training Company (AITC) is to provide formal courses of instruction to Infantry Marines, as directed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps.
2. The secondary mission is to make available duty experts and

essential materials for Mobile Training Team (MTT) assignments at the discretion and direction of the Commanding Officer, School of Infantry.⁴

The mission statement gives an indication that the recently added MCIC is not the main focus of effort nor is the training of non- infantry MOS given emphasis. The universal truth in tactical situations, when a commander "defends all he defends nothing" certainly applies when the word focus is substituted. The staff at AITC is proficient and well led, but cannot focus in all directions simultaneously. The Company staff consists of a Director (Major), Executive Officer (Capt), Operations Officer (Capt) First Sergeant Non- Instructor who has served in a training battalion, but may not have Instructor/ Infantry background, twenty Squad Instructors (SSgt/GySgt), ten Squad Instructors (SGT), and Administration Clerk (Cpl). No criteria for the selection of a MCIC instructor exists although each is individually chosen based on the judgment of the AITC Director.

A way to add focus to the leadership and development of the Marine Combat Instructor is to assign an Infantry Captain as the Commanding Officer. This billet should be assigned to an Infantry Captain who has commanded a training company, whose sole duty is the supervision, and

⁴ AITC Home page. Retrieved 30 November 2005.
<http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/soi/>

more importantly the screening of potential Marine Combat Instructors.

The Drill Instructor Schools also teach more than one course, but, in contrast to AITC, the Drill Instructor School is a much more focused institution. The Drill Instructor School conducts numerous Programs of Instruction, which are all based on the Drill Instructor Course, which awards the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS 8511). Using the DI course as a baseline of instruction, the school also teaches other related courses. For enlisted Marines, the Senior Drill Instructor Course is offered, for 8511 Marines who advance during their tour, and the Prior Drill Instructor Course for Marines returning to 8511 billets for a second tour. For officers, the Series Officer Course, for newly reporting company grade officers as well as the Company Commander's Course.

The Drill Instructor Course is the standard that all other Programs of Instruction taught at Drill Instructor School are based upon. The Drill Instructor School mission statement leaves no doubt where the focus of effort lies:

The mission of the Drill Instructor School is to develop the knowledge, command presence, leadership and instructional ability of selected officers, staff non-commissioned and non-commissioned officers

and to evaluate their suitability to successfully perform the duties of a series officer and drill instructor.²

The school staff consists of a Director (Major), Assistant Director (Capt), First Sergeant Chief Instructor (1stSgt), eight Squad Instructors (GySgt), Administration Chief (Sgt) and Administration Clerk (Cpl). Each Instructor is a current Drill Instructor and has previously served on the Drill Field for one or more tours. They are closely screened and individually selected.

Every Marine a rifleman?

Prior to the designation of SDA, Marine Combat Instructors were assigned to instructor duty from various commands, many via the Fleet Assistance Program (FAP)⁶. The FAP proved to be a double- edged sword in that nearly all Marines assigned to SOI via the FAP had infantry backgrounds, but lacked instructor skills and formal instruction required for SDA. Additionally, the School of Infantry was forced to accept nearly any Marine sent via FAP regardless of quality or suitability for instructor duty.

With the arrival of SDA, Marines who seek the 8513 additional MOS may be selected from all primary MOS. This

² Drill Instructor School Home page, MCRD Parris Island. Retrieved 26 November 2005.
http://www.mcrdpi.usmc.mil/di_main.htm

⁶ MCO 1000.8 Fleet Assistance Program. Dated 12 July 1994.

poses many challenges, particularly for those Marines in non-combat arms primary MOS. These individuals have not practiced the MCCS since they themselves were students at Marine Combat Training. For example, a SNCO or NCO who has spent the last several years as an avionics technician or administrative clerk, can check in to SOI knowing nearly nothing about infantry tactics, techniques and procedures. In seven weeks, he is expected to be the duty expert. This example must be considered the lowest common denominator. The skill sets taught at MCIC are divided into the 9 duty areas that make up the MCCS.

In many cases, the MCI is not fully prepared to assume his role as an expert because the training of the 8513 lacks focus and depth. Of the 7 weeks of MCIC, two full weeks are devoted to Formal Schools Instructor's Course (FSIC) taught aboard Camp Johnson Marine Combat Service Support Schools, which qualifies all 8513s as platform instructors. This large amount of training time is used even though only a small percentage of newly graduated 8513 assume initial duty as platform instructors.⁷

⁷ Harris, Capt J. E., USMC Telephone interview with the author, 22 November 2005.

School training versus Practical Experience

Commanding Officers expect 8513 Marine Staff Sergeants to be leaders of men. Many times this is not the case. In many instances, particularly in non-combat arms MOS's, these Marines have no experience leading more than a handful of individuals. This is a tough situation for the new 8513 SSGt to be in. Consider, for example, the aforementioned Avionics Technician as a brand new 8513 Staff Sergeant. In the conduct of his daily duties in the Avionics shop, he supervised five individuals in a highly technical field. As an 8513 SSGT Platoon Commander, he will be directly responsible for the training, health, and welfare of one hundred students. Additionally he must supervise the conduct and proficiency of eight NCO Combat Instructors. The Schools of Infantry ease this transition by assigning the new join to "bird dog" for one cycle or more until he is ready to assume the role of Platoon Commander. The determination is made by the Company Commander based on his own observations as well as recommendations from his Company First Sergeant and Company Gunnery Sergeant. Once this determination is made he is considered capable of leading a platoon in a field training environment as well as in garrison. This is not problematic in the case of the assignment of Corporals and Sergeants, as they are junior

in rank and experience to the SSGT platoon commander, and are expected to need mentorship and guidance of the SNCO. The most significant problems arise when the new 8513 is senior in rank (SSGT), but has no practical experience in the training of new Marines, or lacks proficiency in certain duty areas. Conversely, a Marine Sergeant can check aboard the company, and within a matter of months, is ready for the increased responsibility of the ownership of his own platoon. The opportunity does not exist within the training battalion for this Marine, regardless of maturity or proficiency level, to assume the next higher billet. This system ensures a flat organizational structure in practice. The current practice fails to support the development of SNCO leadership skills, forces unnecessary officer involvement, and does not take full advantage of the knowledge and experience of all Combat Instructors.

The mindset aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot is totally different. New Drill Instructors, once assigned to a platoon team, fall under the direct supervision of the Senior Drill Instructor. He is directly responsible for all his platoon does or fails to do. He is the most

knowledgeable, proficient, and experienced Drill Instructor on the team.⁸

The assignment and substantial promotion in status to Senior Drill Instructor is made based on experience and performance regardless of rank. One of the Senior Drill Instructor's primary duties is to train the new Drill Instructor to operate effectively as a member of his team and ultimately the junior DI will become a SDI in the future. The goal for all Drill Instructors is to become the Senior as this title holds much prestige.

The development of the new Drill Instructor is accomplished through direct daily contact with the SDI who is supervised by the series Officer. This hierarchy within the platoon team creates an extra tier in the organization that serves to push NCO supervision to the Staff Non-Commissioned Officer level where it belongs. This additional layer in the structure grows leaders of drill platoons from within and could be easily implemented at the Schools of Infantry.

Although the skill sets taught at MCRD and SOI are vastly different, the Schools of Infantry will benefit by using techniques used on the recruit depots. Providing focused infantry training that produces knowledgeable, and

⁸ Gross, A. Capt. USMC, Interview with the author 15 November 2005.

proficient Instructors, coupled with an increased emphasis on practical experience based on billet performance will produce a more effective Marine Combat Instructor. This in turn will increase the quality of his work: The well trained Marine.

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